

Henderson County Court House  
Henderson County  
Oquawka, Illinois

HABS Ill. 240

HABS  
ILL,  
36-OQUA,  
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*Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings*

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District No. Ill.I.

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Earl H. Reed, District Officer  
435 North Michigan Ave., Chicago

HENDERSON COUNTY COURT HOUSE  
HENDERSON COUNTY  
OQUAWKA, ILLINOIS.

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ILL,  
36 OQUA,  
1-

DISTRICT NO. ILL.1.  
NORTHERN ILLINOIS

EARL H. REED  
DISTRICT OFFICER

Project No. Ill. 240

Ralph F. Gross  
H.Stewart Leonard

SOURCE

History of  
Mercer and  
Henderson  
Counties  
(1882)  
p.881

In 1840 Warren County was divided and Henderson County was organized. Immediate steps were taken to erect a courthouse. S.S. and Alexis Phelps, the original proprietors, donated two hundred lots which were to be sold and the proceeds were for the construction of the building. In addition they donated the land with the reservation that should the court-house be removed the property would revert to the estate.

History of  
Henderson  
County  
(1911)  
Vol.II,  
p. 638

The county commissioners met on September 5, 1841, and asked for bids, to be delivered on October 28th, for 175,000 brick and 227 perch of stone (a perch is  $24\frac{3}{4}$  cubic feet). One half of the brick was to be delivered July 1, 1842 and the remainder on the 20th of the same month. Bids were asked for 22 windows and for 6 door frames. At the meeting of the commissioners, August 15, 1842, the bids were opened for the laying of the walls and for the roof. It was found that Alexis Phelps, who was one of the commissioners, had submitted the low bid of \$1,219.00. He was to receive payment eight months after the work was done. There seem to have been indications of frenzied finance for the commissioners stated that should he not be paid then, he was to receive interest at the rate of 8% until he was paid.

History of  
Mercer and  
Henderson  
Counties  
(1882) p.927

There is no record or direct mention of an architect. There was, however, Abner Hebbard, who arrived in Oquawka in 1842 and who formed a partnership with Joseph Chickering and C.W. Cowan in the manufacture of furniture. Hebbard had been one of Owen Lovejoy's Company when that staunch abolitionist was shot. This same source continues with the statement he was an "architect by trade" and that he

"aided in building the Courthouse." It has been impossible to determine the extent of his activity. Shortly after the courthouse was completed he moved on to Galesburg, where he was killed by a circular saw.

The courthouse is a simple, two story rectangular building with a central hallway dividing the lower floor into symmetrical office spaces for the county and circuit clerks, the recorder and the county judge. The second floor consisted of but one big court room which now has none of the original furniture. There may have been two stairs leading from the first to the second floor. This would carry out the symmetry and there was space for it. At present there is but the one stairway.

The sheriff's office was in a small wooden building erected on the southwest corner of the court-house lot. The sheriff also united the duties of tax collector in earlier days.

There have been a number of additions and subsequent alterations. The record vault on the southwest is thought by some to have been part of the original scheme, others think it somewhat later in date. At varying dates there were added another vault contiguous with the first and a wing on the east. Shortly after 1900 the rear door of the central hallway was taken out and a small cubicle erected there for the judge's use. About 1905 this was converted into a stenographic office and another larger room added on to this.

Charles Shell  
Blacksmith  
Oquawka.

The four columns of the main portico were constructed of brick and were circular in plan. About 1905 they were stuccoed over and given their present appearance, and the original shingles have also been replaced by asphalt paper roofing.

Although Oquawka cannot boast of a Lincoln-Douglas debate, the citizens heard Douglas speak in front of the court-house, on Monday, October 4, 1858 and heard

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Lincoln's rebuttal October 9th.  
Douglas was also the first circuit  
judge.

By Ralph F. Cross

Approved Earl W. Reed